

ABSTRACT  
SOCIAL WORK

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A STUDY OF ABUSIVENESS AMONG BLACK HETEROSEXUAL COUPLES AS  
EFFECTED BY INCOME AND EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

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This thesis viewed abusive black couples in an attempt to determine the influence of income and exposure to violence. The purpose of the study was to determine the frequency of partner abuse among blacks of all income levels and the effects of a history of violent exposure on abuse in later life. The research was pursued out of interest for establishing interventions that specifically address blacks in abusive unions.

Secondary data were collected primarily for convenience purposes. As it was necessary to gather facts on black individuals in abusive relationships, case files on such clients from the agency of Families First were used. A total of 55 black individuals that were involved currently or recently in an abusive relationship were selected for the study.

The findings revealed that every person among the population studied had previous exposure to violence, and income was not found to be a factor in determining the incident of domestic violence. It can be interpreted that the event of violent exposure is a good indicator for potential violence in future intimate relationships among blacks. Further research is needed to identify specific social work strategies that may work to end abuse among black couples who are exposed to violence in their daily living.

A STUDY OF ABUSIVENESS AMONG BLACK HETEROSEXUAL COUPLES AS  
EFFECTED BY INCOME AND EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY  
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KEAON N. GREEN

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This thesis was completed towards the conclusion of one of the most televised, complex, and longest legal cases dealing with domestic violence and murder witnessed by a national audience: the O.J. Simpson trial. Prior to this, national news media exposed other high-profile examples of domestic violence among blacks involve music artists Ike and Tina Turner, Al Green, and Lionel Ritchie. These popular examples of domestic violence among blacks hint to an area in need of investigation.

In the local Atlanta news media, broadcasts and newspapers are often filled with reports of black-on-black violence which are often domestic. In March 1997, a report of extreme domestic violence involving blacks was seen on television and documented by The Atlanta Journal/Constitution. The situation involved a black man as the main suspect in the murder of his girlfriend and the resulting kidnapping of her grandson as he allegedly stole her car. Four days after the incident, the suspect turned himself in to police custody and the child was returned to his family.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis discusses the growing concern over domestic violence and abusive relationships in this country, but focuses solely on black Americans. As a member of this group, the researcher feels a connection with those people of a similar heritage and wishes to empower blacks that are involved in a violent relationship. This document can not only

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<sup>1</sup>Mike Weiss, *Alleged Killer in Custody; Child is Safe*, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 16 March 1997, Section: Local News, p. F1.



provide information to those that wish to understand their current situation, but it can also serve to reveal information that may or may not have been considered an issue by intimates. Thus, the focus on abusive relationships among black heterosexual couples as effected by income and exposure to violence is more than research, but a possible guide for these couples to recreate prosperous and fruitful relationships that will endure.

### **Definition of Terms**

The research is based on social work principles and methodology. Some of the terminology used is unique to the profession. Therefore, definitions are provided to convey the meaning of the terms listed.

One important concept to be defined is domestic violence, which is “a general term used to describe the battering or abusive acts within an abusive relationship. Physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and destructive acts are all forms of domestic violence.”<sup>2</sup> This term is important to the understanding of partner abuse, which essentially is the occurrence of domestic violence among two individuals involved in an intimate relationship. The variable of partner abuse is the constant among the people under study.

The population in question is comprised of black heterosexual men and women involved in an intimate relationship. It is important to define the characteristics of the population to be researched for the sake of setting parameters. The term black American

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<sup>2</sup>Evelyn C. White, 1994, *Chain Chain Change: for Black Women in Abusive Relationships*, expanded 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Seattle: Seal Press, 5.

is determined in this thesis from two text sources that provide clarity to the understanding of the definition.

From the Academic American Encyclopedia comes the following definition for black Americans: "...those persons in the United States who trace their ancestry to members of the Negroid race in Africa. ...The vast majority of black Americans are descendants of people forcibly removed to North America as slaves. The black American population also includes more recent immigrants from black Africa, the West Indies, and Latin America."<sup>3</sup> This definition looks at the term Negroid as a race and groups all African descendants together, but not the Encyclopedia Americana that states: "Although the ancestors of American Negroes came from all parts of Africa, the vast majority were West Africans, from what are now Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria."<sup>4</sup> Black Americans are as different as their ancestors' countries of origin, and can be seen in the various complexions and among the various attributes of the people.<sup>5</sup>

The word couple simply refers to two items, as in a couple of people. The couples in the research are those that identify their sexual orientation to be heterosexual, to restrict the work of the researcher to viewing intimate relationships between a man and a woman. The definition of heterosexuality as found in the World Book Encyclopedia is being "primarily attracted to the opposite sex."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>*Academic American Encyclopedia*, 1993 ed., s.v. "Black Americans."

<sup>4</sup>*The Encyclopedia Americana*, 1996 ed., s.v. "Black Americans."

<sup>5</sup>*Academic American Encyclopedia*, 1993 ed., s.v. "Black Americans."

<sup>6</sup>*World Book Encyclopedia*, 1996 ed., s.v. "Sexuality: Sexual orientation."

The other variables of importance in this study are income and exposure to violence. Income is defined by the World Book Encyclopedia “in terms of consumption and wealth” as “the total value of goods and services a person can buy during a certain period with no loss of wealth,” with wealth representing “investments and property.”<sup>7</sup> As for the term exposure to violence, its definition is most compatible to the stressors that cause Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, a guide by which many social work professionals diagnose clients, offers this concept for exposure to violence in regards to PTSD:

The essential feature of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder is the development of characteristic symptoms following exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one’s physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate.<sup>8</sup>

### **Statement of the Problem**

This thesis offers a guideline for further research on abusive relationships among black heterosexual couples in the United States. This abusiveness is usually labeled domestic violence. Domestic violence, according to advocates of the victims, does not receive enough attention from government officials. In the handbook, “Domestic Violence: The Facts,” it is noted that “Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to

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<sup>7</sup>*World Book Encyclopedia*, 1996 ed., s.v. “Income.”

<sup>8</sup>*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Ed. (DSM-IV)*, 1994, Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 424.

women between ages 15 and 44 in the United States,” yet “there are nearly three times as many animal shelters as there are shelters for battered women and their children.”<sup>9</sup>

Certain details regarding domestic violence are not always made clear in texts. These details include race, income, age, history of violence, and other demographic information. The statement of the problem addresses the desire for further research of domestic violence cases involving black couples as influenced by income and exposure to violence. One reason for the need for future research is due to the number of abuse cases called to the attention of authorities. “The FBI estimates that only about 10% of domestic violence is reported to the police.”<sup>10</sup>

There are several authors of domestic violence articles that either extract data from or model their research after the works of Richard Gelles, Robert Hampton, or Murray Straus. These three researchers—who are considered to be experts in examining domestic violence—worked exclusively with black couples in some of their projects.<sup>11</sup> One such project examined the comparison of the National Family Violence Survey as distributed in 1975 and as reissued in 1985. Two of the researchers discussed the findings in a later article.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Peace at Home, Inc., 1997, Myths and Facts About Domestic Violence, *Domestic Violence: The Facts—A Handbook to STOP Violence*, <http://www.cybergrrl.com/dv/book/myth.html>.

<sup>10</sup>NetBenefit, 1997, Family Violence, Child Abuse, and Spousal Abuse, *Domestic Violence: Some Disturbing Facts*, <http://www.netbenefit.com/causes.html>.

<sup>11</sup>Robert L. Hampton, Richard J. Gelles, and John W. Harrop, 1989, Is Violence in Black Families Increasing? A Comparison of 1975 and 1985 National Survey Rates, *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 51:969-980.

<sup>12</sup>Jay Anderson, ed., 1988, Views: From Gelles, Straus on Male and Female Spousal Abuse, *Intimate Violence*, <http://www.vix.com/men/battery/gelles/views.html>.

There are several other publications on the subject of domestic violence among blacks, even those that have statistics to validate their data. However, these books are rarely written from findings from empirical research. Thus, this thesis will attempt to address the occurrence of partner abuse—or domestic violence—among blacks, and will do so in relation to income and exposure to violence.

### **Significance of the Study**

Research in the area of abusive relationships among black couples is necessary at least for the social work purpose of establishing race-specific intervention. At present, there are few strategies available to social workers for such practice. An article which is found to cover such ethnically-sensitive practice, written by Oliver J. Williams, asserts, “Although it is recognized that wife abuse is prevalent among African Americans, relatively little attention has been given to the particular needs that arise in this connection.”<sup>13</sup> There are some researchers that only analyze the general population of the U.S. in regards to domestic violence. Specific research is necessary to locate anomalies unique to black couples. The number of interventions available to black couples should increase as the findings of this thesis expand and improve the social work knowledge base.

The practical significance of this study exists in trying to understand black couples in abusive relationships, as the results may provide a need for more ethnically-focused counseling. Social workers, for example, that operate in group-oriented settings may be able to foster a bond between abusive couples by having them bear witness to other

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<sup>13</sup>Oliver J. Williams, 1994, Group Work with African American Men Who Batter: Toward more Ethnically Sensitive Practice, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 25:91.

testimonials of abuse, which may reveal similarities between clients and help them to find solutions together. Understanding the basic cultural background of black Americans and how their attributes influence the occurrence of abuse underlines the practicality of the research.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of income and exposure to violence on partner abuse among black heterosexual couples in Atlanta, Georgia.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Income and Partner Abuse**

Income, as defined in Chapter One, is measured by a person's spending power, or ability to purchase goods and services without losing personal wealth. The ability to purchase comes from financial earnings, such as wages and government aid. In American society there is the establishment of classes, which are often divided by level of income. These levels include lower, middle, and upper. The designation of income levels is explored in relation to partner abuse to address the correlating hypothesis.

Partner abuse is a global concern that is not particular to age, race, economic class, or gender. However, facts are available concerning spousal abuse, a form of partner abuse, with data repeatedly finding the wife as the victim, introducing the variable of gender. One such source of information is found in the World Wide Web at the Cybergrrl Webstation, which offers statistics from a handbook published by Peace at Home, Inc. This handbook explores the homelessness of women and children due to domestic violence and reveals that many professionals such as doctors, psychologists, ministers, and lawyers are also guilty of abuse, and that poor people are unjustly stereotyped,<sup>1</sup> thus the introduction of income as a variable.

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<sup>1</sup>Peace at Home, Inc., 1997, *Myths and Facts About Domestic Violence, Domestic Violence: The Facts—A Handbook to STOP Violence*, <http://www.cybergrrl.com/dv/book/myth.html>.

Another page at the Cybergrl Webstation states that the percentage given for middle-class divorces due to spousal abuse is 22 percent.<sup>2</sup> Monetary loss is also a concern, not only for working individuals but for their employers as well. The Colorado Domestic Violence Coalition and the Employee Assistance Providers, respectively, gave these two statements to the webpage: “Each year, medical expenses from domestic violence total at least \$3 to \$5 billion [and] businesses forfeit another \$100 million in lost wages, sick leave, absenteeism and non-productivity.”<sup>3</sup> “It is estimated that 25% of workplace problems such as absenteeism, lower productivity, turnover and excessive use of medical benefits are due to family violence.”<sup>4</sup>

As previously stated, family abuse has been considered a factor in causing homelessness: “Nationally, 50 percent of all homeless women and children are on the streets because of violence in the home.”<sup>5</sup> An article by Richard H. Ropers, which speaks directly to the existence of the contemporary homeless,<sup>6</sup> and a report by Joseph E. France, that address the specific needs of the homeless via organizations such as the American

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<sup>2</sup>General Facts About Domestic Violence, 1997, *Domestic Violence Statistics—General Facts*, <http://www.cybergrrl.com/dv/stat/stagen.html>.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Peace at Home, Inc., 1997, *Myths and Facts About Domestic Violence, Domestic Violence: The Facts—A Handbook to STOP Violence*, <http://www.cybergrrl.com/dv/book/myth.html>.

<sup>6</sup>Richard H. Ropers, 1988, *The Invisible Homeless: A New Urban Ecology*, Edison, NJ: Human Sciences Press Warehouse.



National Red Cross,<sup>7</sup> also confirm that domestic violence as well as financial crises are major causes of homelessness.

It should be evident that domestic violence occurs at all income levels. The following paragraph, however, places emphasis on the frequency of occurrence.

It is important to realize that abuse and abusers are at every level in society. Lack of emotional health and psychological stability is often cited as a significant root cause to abusive individuals. Adults with negative self-concepts and personality disorders—not to mention mental illness—are more likely to be abusers than adults with more stable emotional health. Disadvantaged families have abusive situations more often than [sic] economically stable families.<sup>8</sup>

Another article, written by social worker Sandra Arbetter, utilized information retrieved from a study conducted in Rhode Island on domestic violence. The study showed that nearly 20 of 1,000 women with incomes over \$40,000 were previous abuse victims.<sup>9</sup> Such a small number of women with high incomes that admit to being abused almost confirms that domestic abuse occurs more often among women with lower incomes. Rusbult and Martz found these results:

Rusbult's investment model is used to understand the conditions under which individuals are likely to remain in abusive relationships. Analyses of data from intake interviews at a shelter for battered women provided good support for model predictions. Consistent with hypotheses, feelings of commitment were greater among women who

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<sup>7</sup>Joseph B. France, 1986, *Recognizing the Needs of the Homeless*, Washington, D.C.: American National Red Cross.

<sup>8</sup>NetBenefit, 1997, *Family Violence, Child Abuse, and Spousal Abuse, Domestic Violence: Some Disturbing Facts*, <http://www.netbenefit.com/causes.html>.

<sup>9</sup>Sandra Arbetter, M.S.W., 1995, *Family Violence: When We Hurt the Ones We Love*, *Current Health* 2:6-12.

had poorer-quality economic alternatives, were more heavily invested in their relationships, and experienced lesser dissatisfaction.<sup>10</sup>

There is literature that discusses partner abuse specifically among black couples using the variable of income, but the available data is minute compared to other less specific partner abuse studies. One article that does deal with black couples and domestic violence infers reasons for the high rate of black wives killing their husbands. Sociologist Peggy Plass from the University of Virginia believes that "... economics is a major reason that black women stay in abusive relationships."<sup>11</sup> Hampton, Gelles, and Harrop make a longitudinal comparison of a national study done in 1975 to a similar one performed in 1985. These survey results are not only the first to provide a national tool for reporting statistics on wife abuse, but they are also the first to use the variable of race to reveal the occurrence of abuse in black families. Several allusions to income are made in the article, including the overrepresentation of poor families and children in abuse cases and the assumption that violence toward black women in general has decreased due to economic and structural changes.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Caryl E. Rusbult and John M. Martz, 1995, Remaining in an Abusive Relationship: an Investment Model Analysis of Nonvoluntary Dependence, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 21:558.

<sup>11</sup>Peggy Plass, 1993, Husbands Are the Most Likely to be Murdered in American Black Families, Study Concludes, *University News Office*, University of Virginia, <http://www.vix.com/men/battery/dead-black-husband.html>.

<sup>12</sup>Robert L. Hampton, Richard J. Gelles, and John W. Harrop, 1989, Is Violence in Black Families Increasing? A Comparison of 1975 and 1985 National Survey Rates, *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 51:969-980.

Hampton and Gelles wrote another significant article that uses income as a variable while researching black couples. The article concentrates on the results of the second survey used in the previously discussed essay. Findings related to income suggest that the variable is a major influence in abuse rates among black families, especially compared to whites. A research table which controlled for income and race not only showed a higher amount of husband-to-wife violence in black families than to white families (almost a 2:1 ratio), but also the occurrence of violence in low and “other” income black families differed. Results show that 257 low-income black couples out of 1,000 experience some amount of spousal abuse, as opposed to 167 “other” income black couples.<sup>13</sup>

As an additional note, Maulana Karenga forged the concept of four “connections” by which American society operates and influences black ideals. From the understanding of Karenga, “...the cash connection is the most basic and pervasive relation, stems from situations in which the power of money ‘...becomes, not only a means of control, define and deform, but also a *means of existence*.’ ”<sup>14</sup>

Delores Aldridge, known for publications on black male-female relationships in present-day America, has a comparable design to Karenga’s connections of how black American relationships are formed. She describes four ideological institutions: “capitalism, racism, sexism, and the Judeo-Christian ethic are interlinked and form a power pattern of socialization that results in self and other oppression by black people upon

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<sup>13</sup>Robert L. Hampton, and Richard J. Gelles, 1994, Violence Toward Black Women in a Nationally Representative Sample of Black Families, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 25:105-119.

<sup>14</sup>Haki Madhubuti, 1990, *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous? The Afrikan American Family in Transition*, Chicago: Third World Press, 177-8.

themselves and each other.”<sup>15</sup> Oppression, in this case, is the abuse and income is found to be an influence as a facet of capitalism.

### **Exposure to Violence and Partner Abuse**

Violent exposure is an incident that occurs more often than not in American society. The violence of America can be seen in such instances as child, spousal, and sexual abuse; the waging of war in the military; violent gang activity; murder, near-death situations, and beatings; and arguments between individuals or groups of people of a legal, political, or socioeconomic nature. A simple view of America’s past reveals a history of violence that began with feuds against Native Americans, the American Revolutionary War, and slavery. More examples of violent behavior and actions have followed since.

The discussion on exposure to violence follows the definition of “stressors” found in the diagnosis of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. Some of the aforementioned incidents of violent exposure, whether witnessed or experienced, are considered to be stressors as seen in the definition of PTSD. This thesis considers violent exposure as an influence on partner abuse.

This thesis views exposure to violence from several viewpoints, starting with domestic violence in a heterosexual relationship and concluding with exposure to violence at childhood and its effects on future relationships. Although the following statement does not reveal the only method of being exposed to violence covered in this thesis, the Family

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<sup>15</sup>Delores P. Aldridge, 1991, *Focusing: Black Male-Female Relationships*, Chicago: Third World Press, 26.

Violence Prevention Fund, or FUND, offers information on domestic violence and its relation to exposure of violence. “More than one in three Americans have witnessed an incident of domestic violence...”<sup>16</sup>

Jay Anderson proposes that women are rarely, if ever, at fault in domestic violence cases, even if she strikes first because of previous violence. He pleads “...more often than not a wife who beats her husband has herself been beaten. Her violence is the violence of self-defense. On some occasions she will strike back to protect herself; on others she will strike first, believing that if she does not, she will be badly beaten.”<sup>17</sup> The effects of abuse often influence people’s opinions and behaviors toward abuse in all stages of life. Arbetter finds that “Children who witness (or are victims of) abuse are at risk for... becoming abusive themselves. ... Girls from abusive homes tend to become victims. Boys tend to see violence as the way to deal with frustration.”<sup>18</sup>

However, abuse is not gender-specific, especially if violence has occurred before. Two studies in 1989 show that more than one-fifth of marital homicides with the husband as the victim occurred after earlier abuse or threats of abuse. These same wives, either convicted or accused of murder, were found to have been arrested at least 60 percent of the time in 1989 and 1990.<sup>19</sup> A study of female inmates revealed murder as the main

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<sup>16</sup>Family Violence Prevention Fund, 1997, General Statistics, *Family Violence Prevention Fund (FUND)*. [http://www.igc.apc.org/fund/the\\_facts/stats.html](http://www.igc.apc.org/fund/the_facts/stats.html).

<sup>17</sup>Jay Anderson, ed., 1988, Views: From Gelles, Straus on Male and Female Spousal Abuse, *Intimate Violence*, <http://www.vix.com/men/battery/gelles/views.html>.

<sup>18</sup>Sandra Arbetter, M.S.W., 1995, Family Violence: When We Hurt the Ones We Love, *Current Health* 2:7.

<sup>19</sup>Ted W., 1995, Not Just in Self Defense: When Wives Hit, *DV Stories in the Newspaper*, <http://www.vix.com/pub/men/battery/stats/self-defense-gelles.html>.

violent offense committed. These women are twice as likely to victimize, harm, or kill an intimate, but serve less time than a man with the same conviction.<sup>20</sup> These data from researchers like Jurik and Gregware<sup>21</sup> and statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice<sup>22</sup> deny the claim that for most women self-defense is the reason for the victimization or murder of spouses or loved ones.

Peggy Plass conducted a study on black husbands and homicide which labeled women as the more-probable victims of partner homicide at least before the age of 30, when the trend reverses. The article further mentions that black women that murder their spouses do so primarily to escape abusive relationships.<sup>23</sup> Katherine Dunn, who wrote an article concerning the misreporting of domestic violence and those involved, revealed that wives murder their husbands as often as husbands murder their wives, especially among black people and that abuse is a major part of the relationship. Additionally, she confirms earlier findings which say that murder is not always committed in self-defense.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ted W., 1995, Sentencing! Rate by Gender, *Violent Women*, <http://www.vix.com/pub/men/battery/studies/by-gender.html>.

<sup>21</sup>Ted W., 1995, Not Just in Self Defense: When Wives Hit, *DV Stories in the Newspaper*, <http://www.vix.com/pub/men/battery/stats/self-defense-gelles.html>.

<sup>22</sup>Ted W., 1995, Sentencing! Rate by Gender, *Violent Women*, <http://www.vix.com/pub/men/battery/studies/by-gender.html>.

<sup>23</sup>Peggy Plass, 1993, Husbands Are the Most Likely to be Murdered in American Black Families, Study Concludes, *University News Office*, University of Virginia, <http://www.vix.com/men/battery/dead-black-husband.html>.

<sup>24</sup>Katherine Dunn, 1994, Truth Abuse: The Media's Wife-Beating Hype, *The New Republic* 211:16-17.

The 1994 Hampton and Gelles study discloses that one of the reasons for limited data on domestic violence among black couples is due to the presumption by researchers that the results will “lead to more negative assumptions about” black couples and families, such as discovering that domestic violence, and likewise the exposure to violence, occurs more frequently among blacks.<sup>25</sup> For instance, research that has been targeted towards minorities has found that young black and Hispanic women, as well as poor single women in the inner cities, are particularly vulnerable to domestic violence, as presented by the U.S. Department of Justice.<sup>26</sup> The following information on intergenerational transmission reveals the effects of exposure to violence among the blacks studied in the research:

...men were more likely to have been hit by their fathers and mothers as teens than women were, and men were more likely to have witnessed their mothers hitting their fathers. ...Males were more likely to approve of [husband slapping] than females. Much to our surprise there were no gender differences in attitudes toward wife slapping. ...we see that for females there is no relationship between witnessing or experiencing violence in the family of orientation and the highest level of husband-to-wife violence in the past year. ...The relationship did exist, however, for male respondents. ...it suggests that the intergenerational transmission of violence may have a greater impact on black perpetrators than victims.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Robert L. Hampton, and Richard J. Gelles, 1994, Violence Toward Black Women in a Nationally Representative Sample of Black Families, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 25:105-119.

<sup>26</sup>U.S. Department of Justice, 1994, Two-Thirds of Women Violence Victims are Attacked by Relatives or Acquaintances, *Violence Against Women*, <http://www.vix.com/pub/men/battery/studies/violence-against-women.html>.

<sup>27</sup>Robert L. Hampton, and Richard J. Gelles, 1994, Violence Toward Black Women in a Nationally Representative Sample of Black Families, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 25:110, 112, 115.

In an attempt to comprehend the function of violent behavior by black men toward their spouses, Lenora Greenbaum Ucko takes a view at the interplay between “gender role ideologies” from Africa and America. Contrasting the gender roles, male dominance in Africa was not portrayed as strongly as in American culture. The sub-Saharan countries where Africans were captured and brought to the Americas as slaves are known for allowing relationships where women were equal, if not superior to, men. In the Euro-American ideology, white males are dominating or even violent forces in family, business, and other institutions.

The interaction of these two attitudes, Ucko argues, created a dual personality among black males. It became necessary for black males to imitate white males for survival; for example, the black male utilized various sexual exploits against his wife, with whom he also assisted in raising a family. Later, it seems that the desire to follow the lead of the white male in America became a primary goal of black males, with the problem black males faced being the failure to achieve equality. This internal conflict manifested into actions by black males that are now thought to be emotionally and physically threatening to black families in America.<sup>28</sup>

Further concentration on the black population of the U.S. is provided by Hare and Hare, who present complementary data in their collection of articles pertaining to black sexual politics. “Black females are killed three to four times more frequently than white females, given to the fact that they are predominantly exposed to the geographic, spatial

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<sup>28</sup>Lenora Greenbaum Ucko, 1994, *Culture and Violence: The Interaction of Africa and America*, *Sex Roles* 31:185-203.



and socio-economic factors previously described for the male. Like their white counterparts, black women are usually killed by males of their own race.”<sup>29</sup> Haki Madhubuti, in reference to female-headed families, showed the potential for violent exposure for black men: “The socialization of black males without conscious and caring black men around is, most often than not, replaced with gangs or other negative groups.”<sup>30</sup>

In addition to these contributions, author and editor Evelyn C. White published works that speak to the specific needs of black women dealing with issues of abuse by partners, both heterosexual and homosexual. In her book *Chain Chain Change*, White begins by presenting statistics that speak to the impact of domestic violence among intimates. Her information reveals that violent exposure is not limited to any ethnicity or social status: “... more than 2,000 women [are] killed each year by their intimate partner, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. ...domestic violence rages among people of all races, religions, and socioeconomic backgrounds. No community is immune.”<sup>31</sup>

White specifically addresses the problems of domestic violence among black women. In regards to those who suffer from being in an abusive relationship, she states: “For African American women, who experience both race and gender oppression,

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<sup>29</sup>Nathan Hare, Ph.D., and Julia Hare, Ed.D., 1989, *Crisis in Black Sexual Politics*, San Francisco: Black Think Tank, 143.

<sup>30</sup>Haki Madhubuti, 1990, *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous? The Afrikan American Family in Transition*, Chicago: Third World Press, 73.

<sup>31</sup>Evelyn C. White, 1994, *Chain Chain Change: for Black Women in Abusive Relationships*, expanded 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Seattle: Seal Press, xii.

domestic violence is an especially complex and multilayered demon.”<sup>32</sup> To complicate this matter for black women, exposure to violence is an incredible determinant of future abuse as an intimate or a parent:

Since the family is the primary environment where we learn to relate to others, parents who fight in front of their children provide violent role models for them. Because they see it in the house, the message to children is that violence, humiliation, and disrespect are to be expected in intimate relationships.

Girls in violent homes may come to believe that all men are abusive and that women are naturally abused. Boys may learn that men have a right to batter women. Like their mothers, children raised in violent homes can come to know abuse as caring. They may repeat the pattern of violence by becoming abused or abusive adults. An African American mother who had expressed great pain and bitterness about the violence in her childhood, still had this to say, “It has been difficult not to be abusive with my own kids because that’s the behavior I learned.”<sup>33</sup>

The Black Women’s Health Book, edited by Evelyn White, includes articles meant to be enlightening and therapeutic to black women dealing with issues of child and sexual abuse, diseases, careers in medicine, violent relationships, diversity, and other health issues. While there is not an extensive discussion on abusive relationships throughout this book, it is noteworthy that White viewed domestic violence as a health concern, as if to say domestic violence and all of its associated problems is a disease that can be cured and erased from a woman’s life.<sup>34</sup> This article can help mental health professionals to view

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<sup>32</sup> Evelyn C. White, 1994, *Chain Chain Change: for Black Women in Abusive Relationships*, expanded 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Seattle: Seal Press, xii-xiii.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>34</sup> Evelyn C. White, 1990, *The Black Women’s Health Book: Speaking for Ourselves*, Seattle: Seal Press.

exposure to violence as a possible cause of future domestic violence and give these professionals focus to purge these episodes from women's lives.

Keller concurs with White: "Violence against women by their male partners is a serious public health problem that has not been adequately addressed by the medical and psychiatric professions."<sup>35</sup> Keller's article states that most psychological problems are not viewed as medical and psychiatric situations. The article also looks at the prevalence of "younger, lower income, less-educated men who have observed parental violence in their own home" being at a "higher risk of abusing their spouses."<sup>36</sup> The latter statement shows interplay between income, exposure to violence, and the variables of age and education on partner abuse.

Exposure to violence occurs in different life stages and is believed to have an influence on the formation of relationships. The Solicitor General of the Fulton County Justice Center in Atlanta has many facts in regards to family violence and the impact that violence has on children. They include the following statements: "2-6 million women are beaten in their homes each year. Forty percent of children in violent homes are abused by one or both parents. [Children begin] Acting out at home and school.... Children learn what they see, not what you tell them [thus] they learn [that] violence is a way to get what you want, [it is] okay to hit someone you love, [and it is] morally acceptable."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>L. E. Keller, 1996, Invisible Victims—Battered Women in Psychiatric and Medical Emergency Rooms, *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic*, 60:1-21.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>Carmen D. Smith, Solicitor General, 1997, *Family Violence Information Packet*, Atlanta: Fulton County Justice Center.

A study in the Journal of the American Medical Association viewed abuse occurring among medical students in their childhood and their adult lives. The research found that representative numbers of those surveyed had been abused in both scenarios, more often among women, and in similar numbers to the general population of the U.S.<sup>38</sup> Even among the elderly, spousal abuse is prevalent. An article found in the Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect found that “Although there is a strong negative relationship between age and spousal violence of both sexes, spouse abuse is one of the more common forms of elder abuse.”<sup>39</sup> Further, the article validates the understanding that “many of the risk factors present in abusive couple relationships are the same regardless of age.”<sup>40</sup>

### Conceptual Framework

From a capitalistic perspective as well as an understanding of the experience of blacks in the U.S., the occurrence of partner abuse among blacks may be explained by at least two variables: 1) income and 2) exposure to violence. In this section, the dependent variables are explained in more detail. To thoroughly explain income, it is important to understand the operation of the American capitalist system and the functions of the black population in relation to this institution. As for exposure to violence, it will be necessary to grasp an appropriate understanding of being exposed to violence in this society.

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<sup>38</sup>E. A. Delahunta and A. A. Tulskey, 1996, Personal Exposure of Faculty and Medical-Students to Family Violence, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 275:1903-1906.

<sup>39</sup>S. B. Harris, 1996, For Better or for Worse—Spouse Abuse Grown Old, *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect*, 8:1-33.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

In uncomplicated description, American capitalism is an economic system that grants importance to capital, or money, and allots power to those with large amounts in their possession. Understanding this and taking into consideration the struggles of blacks to obtain the status of those that are considered powerful in this capitalist system, namely white males, in order to gain power, it can be deduced that the level of income obtained by a family unit has an inverse effect on the infliction of abuse by its members. Consequently, those couples who are unable to obtain large incomes are more apt to use abuse, whether it be physical, mental, or emotional punishment, on each other for the purpose of power or dominance, which is usually enacted more by the male.

Since it seems that the rates of abuse are higher in low-income families but not absent in high-income families, it can be assumed that possession of (or lack of) income by the “breadwinner,” the secondary earner, or both parties, has some effect on the use and occurrence of violence in any relationship. Again, couples with high incomes are not immune to the effects of abuse in the home, but those that lack resources are particularly vulnerable to experience domestic violence. Several of the studies already presented have shown that female violence is inversely related to family socioeconomic status.

The other variable, exposure to violence, was chosen for the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of the dynamics of abuse in black unions. Black couples are targeted for at least two reasons: 1) there is an assumption that there is a higher rate of violence among black couples in contrast to whites,<sup>41</sup> and 2) the unique socialization of

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<sup>41</sup>Robert L. Hampton, and Richard J. Gelles, 1994, Violence Toward Black Women in a Nationally Representative Sample of Black Families, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 25:105-119.

blacks in the U.S., past and present, has heavily contributed to the frequency of the occurrence of partner abuse. In both scenarios exposure to violence is strongly linked.

Historically blacks in America have been consistently exposed to some form of violence: the brutality of enslavement and rape by European colonists, riots and wars fought in the U.S. and abroad, the racial battles and the Civil Rights Movement, and in the modern era the internalization of Western ideals that influence blacks to abuse and kill each other, often labeled as covert racism. The incorporation of violence as a learned behavior in relationships, not to mention other social factors like institutionalized racism, have worked to increase the level of abuse in the black population over time.

### **Statement of Hypotheses**

Based on the foregoing conceptual framework, literature review, and purpose of study, the research questions and the associated hypotheses of the thesis are as follows:

Question 1: Does income level determine the level of abuse among black couples?

Question 2: Does exposure to violence effect the occurrence of abuse by black couples?

Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant negative relationship between the amount of income earned and the partner abuse that occurs among black heterosexual couples.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a significant positive relationship between the level of exposure to violence and the occurrence of partner abuse among black heterosexual couples.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Sample**

The population from which data were collected consists of black men and black women currently or recently involved in an abusive relationship with a loved one of the opposite sex. The location of the population is found in the city of Atlanta. This area was selected primarily because of the location of the researcher and the demographics of Atlanta: having a large black population. The sample is representative of black couples of various attributes including age, length of relationship, and employment status. The study attempts to establish an understanding of blacks currently or recently involved in an intimate abusive relationship, which is a population that has no master list. It is possible, however, to seek agencies that work with this population to obtain the data being sought.

The population in question was found at an agency that counsels people seeking help with domestic violence issues, among other concerns. Data on the clients, who were more likely to fit the criteria for participation in the study, were easier to obtain through convenience sampling as opposed to other methods. However, ethics and agency policy prevented direct contact with the population. In order to acquire the data for the research, it became necessary to view case files from clients that received counseling due to the incidence of domestic violence in their intimate relationship. These cases were completed and closed in 1996.

## **Design**

The data used for this study are secondary. Information was collected from files from members of present or past relationships that were found abusive, according to aforementioned definitions of abuse. Data retrieval followed the protocol established by the agency that was approached for the information. The agency has procedures by which researchers can extract data from the files or applications without taking information that may reveal the identity of the clients to the public. The agency approached is named Families First, an Atlanta-based private agency that has a social welfare focus and works with various clients throughout the metropolitan area. An “umbrella” office of Families First was targeted due to its work with high numbers of blacks on various issues, including domestic violence.

The Families First procedure to conduct research is as follows: the employee of Families First interested in researching files must first complete a Research Proposal form stating the intention of the worker with the files. Then the Unit Director of the agency from which the files will originate must approve the form and forward it to the Director of Program Evaluation. The Director of Program Evaluation makes the final decision on the procedure before granting permission to the employee to use data from the files. This usually occurs in less than three weeks and the results from the use of the data must be shown to the Directors after the completion of the research.

The extraction of data from these files was the next step for the researcher. A “Data Extraction” form was created, using a format established by the Solicitor General of



Fulton County in the application/intake form of the Victim/Witness Assistance Program.<sup>1</sup>

This form requests information from clients that focus on type of violence (called “safety assessment”), race, and relationship to the perpetrator. Categories of importance not listed on the intake form but were added to the Data Extraction form are age, income, and the occurrence of past violence in the life of the individual.

In regards to ethics, the procedure for collecting data from client files as set by the agency was followed. A total of fifty-five individuals from cases completed in 1996 were used. The collection instrument was not checked for validity and reliability.

### **Measurements**

The dependent variable of partner abuse is defined as the infliction of intentional harm by a person toward another person to whom there is an intimate link. The categories of partner abuse used are physical, emotional, and mental. The sub-categories for each type of abuse are quite numerous, thus the category of “other” is used in each case to make the categories exhaustive. All individuals in the study were recently or currently involved in a heterosexual relationship.

The first independent variable is income and it is defined as the earning of capital through means of labor or being granted financial assistance, as in welfare payments. The definition includes individuals that are unemployed but still receive financial support from sources such as the government, or those that are self-employed. The definition is

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<sup>1</sup>Carmen D. Smith, Solicitor General, 1997, *Family Violence Information Packet*, Atlanta: Fulton County Justice Center.

measured in terms of annual earnings collapsed into the categories of high, medium, and low, according to the 1996 Statistical Abstract of the U.S.<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the comparable income levels of upper, middle, and lower are used in the data analysis of this thesis, but are not considered rankings. The classifications speak to different economic positions of clients and does not claim that one is better than the other. Thus, income is considered a nominal variable.

The second independent variable is exposure to violence and it is defined in this thesis as the witnessing or experiencing of a violent episode that may have an influence on the behavior of the person in question. Examples include but are not confined to child abuse, domestic violence in a prior intimate relationship, parental violence, violence in a work or school setting, witnessing physical violence by acquaintances, and using weapons. Again, sub-categories are used to identify specific examples of abuse but the main categories by which to include all forms of abuse are physical, mental, and emotional. Nevertheless there is the category of “none” for this variable, in the case that some of the subjects involved in the study fail to reveal a previous experience of violence.

Due to the fact that the Data Extraction form is derived from an application form and the variables have been made mutually exclusive and exhaustive, the majority of the questions on the Data Extraction form are closed-ended. The exception is found with the question on “Event responsible for reporting of abuse.” This question is open-ended for the purpose of identifying the individual cases of abuse. However, this question also has

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<sup>2</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1996*, 116<sup>th</sup> edition, Washington, D.C.

a closed-ended “checklist” of abuse categories that is quantifiable nominally. Thus, the coding for all of the variables follows a numeric range when the data is compounded and are considered nominal measures.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The instrument used to collect data (see Appendix 1) was modified to better collect data from the agency files. The following items were used to test the variables in this study: “Event responsible for reporting of abuse,” “Exposure to Violence,” and “Income Level.” A second sheet, which helps to concisely quantify the variables, is included in the appendix. Fifty-five total forms were completed for the study, mainly due to time constraints and the need for a representative sample. The cases used are from different counselors in the agency.

For the analysis of the data, the nonparametric statistical test of chi-square was used. Chi-square is chosen because all of the variables are categorical and their relationship is the target of the aforementioned research questions and hypotheses. Chi-square is the most used statistical test of such variables and is used to find patterns in data.

A multiple cross-tabulation is utilized to present the relationship between the variables in the research. This table breaks down the variables of income, exposure to violence, and partner abuse and compares the findings of each variable with each other. Thus, exposure to violence and income can both be viewed in terms of effecting the occurrence of partner abuse.

### **Limitations**

This study has numerous limitations. First, the population of black heterosexuals in abusive relationships was only accessed through one agency: Families First, an organization known for working with a large number of black, low income individuals. Further, the number selected was small in comparison to the population of the city. Still, the city of Atlanta was a good choice for a representative city to draw a varied population of blacks.

Another limitation was the ability of accessing the population. Not all abusive couples attend counseling sessions or even report abuse to the proper authorities. As an example, the reporting of domestic violence among the upper class may be far less than that of the lower class simply because individuals with higher incomes from their union may feel as if they may lose money, a comfortable living, or even their mate if the abuse is reported. Thus, there could be difficulty in finding such abusive partners and surveying them. Deadlines and agency policies were also limitations in accessing the population.

Limitations existed in the population itself for the question of how representative are the subjects was a concern. The age range of 18 to 61 and the location of these people in a major metropolitan area were good representations of age variety and residence. Yet, the variance of income and relationship type among heterosexuals was not strong. As well, a comparable study of couples that are not abusive may provide insight with the real significance of income, exposure to violence, and partner abuse. Therefore, at best this research should be seen as a precursor to other studies that give more detail to the measures of income, relationship type, and the role of each individual in the relationship.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION OF RESULTS**

The population was a group of fifty-five black individuals that attended counseling sessions at Families First in regards to domestic violence occurring in their relationships. Of a range from age 18 to 61, the average age of the group for those that recorded an age was 30.75 years. There were 27 males and 28 females selected from the files of the agency. Of the 27 males, 19 of them (70%) were abusers. Three men (11%) were labeled victims, and 5 (19%) were found as both abuser and abused. Among the women, 3 (11%) were both victim and perpetrator, only two females (7%) were solely perpetrators, and 23 women (82%) were victims.

Of the various relationships, 14 people (25%) were married, 3 of the individuals (5%) were divorced, and there were 9 separated relationships (16%). Twenty-three people (42%) were either a boyfriend or girlfriend, while 8 (14%) had broken their relationship. Finally, 33 of the individuals viewed (60%) had a child or children with their partner and possibly involved them in the violence. The exact number of those living together was not available due to the inaccurate recording of data. Some of the couples were assumed to be residing together (married, for example) and thus not given the value for “living together.”

### Influence of Income on Partner Abuse

Income levels were collapsed to lower (\$0-\$9,999), middle (\$10,000-\$34,999), and upper (\$35,000 and above). Forty-five percent of the sample had low incomes, forty-nine percent were in the middle income, and only six percent were found in the upper level. These numbers show that the income of the majority that sought help from the agency of Families First was under \$35,000. It is important to note that nearly half (49%) of the selected individuals in this study had incomes between \$10,000 and \$34,999.

TABLE 1:  
ANNUAL INCOME BY LEVEL FOR ABUSIVE BLACK COUPLES

Income Level	N	Percent
<b>Lower</b>		
below \$5,000	11	20%
\$5,000-\$9,999	14	25%
Total (lower)	25	45%
<b>Middle</b>		
\$10,000-\$19,999	16	29%
\$20,000-\$34,999	11	20%
Total (middle)	27	49%
<b>Upper</b>		
\$35,000-\$49,999	2	4%
\$50,000 and over	1	2%
Total (upper)	3	6%
Total (all levels)	55	100%

### Influence of Exposure to Violence on Partner Abuse

The occurrence of exposure to violence was made evident in every case viewed, but this is not a confirmation that every person involved in an abusive union is exposed to

violence. The finding does hint to a potential relation between exposure to violence and actual occurrence. This assumption will be explored further in the thesis.

In the Data Extraction form, there was an allowance of various types of abuse to be recorded, and there were categories by which to report the stage of life in which the incident occurred: childhood, a past intimate relationship, or the current relationship. This information was collapsed into the categories of emotional abuse, which included violent threats, use of profanity, stalking, stress, depression, and arguing; physical abuse, which included use of weapons or other objects, sexual abuse, restraining your mate, and pushing; and mental abuse, which included harming others, controlling behavior, substance abuse, property damage, and the involvement of family. Those specific types of abuse not listed, mainly because of the possibility of revealing the identity of the participants, were recorded as “other.” It needs to be understood that some of the types of abuse listed can be placed in other categories.

The various types of exposure to violence listed are: 0 = no exposure, 1 = emotional, 2 = physical, 3 = mental, 4 = emotional and physical, 5 = physical and mental, 6 = emotional and mental, and 7 = all three forms of abuse. This list does not take into account the phase of life in which the abuse occurred, as the importance is on the actual incident of violent exposure. To measure the history of violent exposure, the incidents were grouped into the categories of “single,” which can be seen as isolated occurrences, and “multiple,” which speak to a history of violence. Table 2 reveals the average number of incidents of exposure to violence found. An overwhelming majority (69%) of the participants had been exposed to multiple incidents of violence in their past.

TABLE 2:  
FREQUENCY OF INCIDENTS OF EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE PER INDIVIDUAL

Incidents of Violent Exposure	# Incidents	N	Percent, N
single incident	36	17	31%
multiple incidents	227	38	69%
Totals	55	263	100%



### Combined Effects

Table 3 shows the combined effects of income and exposure to violence on partner abuse. The findings show that the occurrence of partner abuse was more often physical in nature, the risk of partner abuse was higher among those that had multiple incidents of violent exposure in their lives, and single incidents of mental abuse were not great predictors of an abusive relationship. One shortcoming for the table was that the zero value of the cell for single incidents of mental abuse, as well as the values for incidents of violent exposure for emotional abuse, may have caused somewhat of an inaccurate result.

The chi-square measure was used to determine if high levels of multiple incidents of exposure to violence yield higher percentages of partner abuse. The chi-square validates the hypothesis that there will be a significant positive relationship between the level of violent exposure and the occurrence of partner abuse among black heterosexual couples. The hypothesis was accepted with reservations related to the zero values in the mental abuse column.

TABLE 3:  
OBSERVED FREQUENCIES: OCCURRENCE OF PARTNER ABUSE BY  
INCIDENT OF EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

Incident	Partner Abuse							
	Emotional		Physical		Mental		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Single	3	5.5	14	25	0	0	17	31
Multiple	3	5.5	28	51	7	13	38	69
Total	6	11	42	76	7	13	55	100

$\chi^2 = 8.294$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .005$  (direction predicted)

When the categories of income are used to control for the findings, as Table 4 shows, each income level yields interesting data. For instance, it is shown that multiple incidents of violent exposure occurred almost twice as often among abusive, lower income black couples than “isolated” single incidents, and the abuse was more often physical. For abusive couples with middle incomes, there was also a high percentage of physical abuse. However, there was a higher occurrence of multiple incidents of mental abuse and a lower occurrence of multiple incidents of physical abuse among those with middle-level income in comparison to those with lower-level incomes. Finally, the statistics on couples with high levels of income indicate that all were involved in multiple incidents of physical violence.

This may be a revelation to a belief that those with higher incomes are quite abusive, at least physically, to their mates but are not motivated to seek help or divulge that information to anyone. With a low p value listed under Table 4, as well as a very high chi-square value for the table, the chance that the research hypothesis is valid was low. The data refuted the assumption of a negative relationship between income earnings and partner abuse. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted; in other words, higher income was not a determinant for lower partner abuse, and vice versa.

There was another statistic of some importance drawn from this research. The frequency of violent exposure by abuse type shows that there were 30 occurrences of emotional abuse, 38 occurrences of physical abuse, and 42 occurrences of mental abuse as taken from the files. The large number of mental abuse reports were probably due to the

fact that these reports were from counseling records; police reports would surely be more focused on physical abuse.

**TABLE 4:  
OCCURRENCE OF PARTNER ABUSE BY INCIDENT OF EXPOSURE TO  
VIOLENCE FOR ALL INCOME CLASSES**

\*Note: percentages are rounded; summations may not reflect accurate amount

Variable	Partner Abuse						Total (levels)	
	Emotional		Physical		Mental			
Single Incident	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
lower income	2	3.6	7	12.7	0	0.0	9	16.4
middle income	1	1.8	7	12.7	0	0.0	8	14.5
upper income	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total (single)	3	5.4	14	25.4	0	0.0	17	30.9
Multiple Incidents								
lower income	1	1.8	13	23.6	2	3.6	16	29.1
middle income	2	3.6	12	21.8	5	9.1	19	34.5
upper income	0	0.0	3	5.4	0	0.0	3	5.4
Total (multiple)	3	5.4	28	50.9	7	12.7	38	69.1
Total (all)	6	10.9	42	76.4	7	12.7	55	100

$\chi^2 = 33.57$ ,  $df = 10$ ,  $p < .0005$

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this presentation was to provide an understanding of the impact that income and exposure to violence has on intimate relationships among black couples. This is not to say that other races or ethnic groups can not benefit from reading this thesis. On the contrary, the findings may help other social workers to better assist clients and populations of various cultures that have experienced violence before, as in a war. But it should be clear that my primary concern was to assist black individuals that find themselves in conflict with their mate.

This thesis was created for the purpose of establishing a guide to further study, both formal and informal, for the black population and researchers that take interest. This thesis offered the assumption that income and exposure to violence are major factors in the operation of black heterosexual relationships. Many research articles pointed to this conclusion as valid, and the data collection in this thesis confirmed that some of the traits among abusive couples along the lines of income and exposure to violence are similar.

There were some findings that were contradictory to the hypotheses, however. One such discovery included the high percentage of blacks in the middle income range who reported abuse occurring in their relationships. Another unexpected finding focused on the amount of exposure to physical violence that occurred among blacks in the study that earned large amounts of income. Additionally, there was the finding that the majority of the subjects were exposed to previous multiple instances of violent episodes.

### **Implications for Social Work Practice**

Those that enter the profession of social work most often confront more than the individual client, despite the service delivery. Whether in a school setting, a hospital, or through other social welfare agencies, the social worker must consider intimate relationships as a dynamic of the client's function. It becomes obvious that the worker should not only be aware of such relationship, but also be prepared to work with the partner or the family so as to accommodate all needed persons in the process of problem solving and healing. Social workers must be adept in counseling couples and families so that the family or partner may help the client in their times of need outside of the agency.

When handling these populations, another factor to consider is race. While there are few race-specific methodologies and theories to assist clients, being able to relate to clients in consideration of race must be the goal of the social worker. This is what the thesis addresses: the ability to help blacks in intimate relationships, as domestic violence is an issue that involves more than the individual that seeks counseling.

The social worker has a lot to consider when focusing on a specific population like blacks involved in an abusive relationship. The use of the ideology behind the Afrocentric Perspective is an option for the worker to use as a strategy to assist clients. For example, the Afrocentric Perspective can be used as a learning tool. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, male dominance was found more often in traditional European culture than traditional African culture. The socialization of the slaves and their descendants forced blacks to adopt the ideology of male domination, which led to an increase in aggressive

men and passive women. A relinquishment of this ideology by blacks in an abusive relationship may be the focus the social worker must take to end the abuse.

The ultimate purpose of the use of the Afrocentric Perspective in the social work arena among the clients that seek help for problems of a strained relationship with their intimate partner would be to strengthen their connection or union, if it is seen as beneficial to the people involved. Opportunities should be disclosed to the clients to help them regain control of their function in the relationship and approach the union with a renewed commitment to make it work. Attention to the specific needs of blacks is given because of the unique history and function of blacks in American society.

Blacks in America, as stated earlier in the thesis, arrived to this country mainly through European enslavement from Africa. The Afrocentric Perspective would consider that slavery not only kept the Africans and their descendants in physical bondage, but also incarcerated their minds and spirits. As mentioned in the research, it became necessary for many of the enslaved blacks, primarily the males, to adapt to their new environment by adopting the customs and beliefs of their oppressors. Many scholars and researchers argue that the effects of slavery still persist today, thus the need for counseling solely directed at blacks in America is present.

The contributions of the social worker to race-specific counseling may prove to be a better alternative to traditional and generalized treatment presently available to couples. The current misconception that poor blacks are more likely to be involved in abusive relationships does not provoke further study on abuse among blacks with high incomes. While this study did not find income to be a factor in causing abuse, income can still be

seen as an item of interest for the worker or researcher that wishes to discover the truth about abuse in that it is not hindered, lowered, or resolved by income of any level.

The ability to counsel clients specifically, with new insight into the function of blacks in American society, is a stark contrast to the counseling that is not race-specific or ethnically guided. Adjusting to a new method of tending to this population will prove to be a challenge, especially when considering exposure to violence. For example, a factor considered in many cases of such diagnoses as post-traumatic stress disorder may need to be considered for blacks in abusive relationships. As a result, upon establishing a method of working with black clients of various incomes who are abusive as a result of being exposed to violence, social workers may be able to help clients from other cultures who abuse as a result of similarly being exposed to violence.

**APPENDIX 1**  
**THESIS DATA EXTRACTION FORM\***  
**(for the purpose of the thesis, "Abusive Relationships Among Black Heterosexual**  
**Couples as Effected by Income and Exposure to Violence")**

♦ All files viewed must be distinguished as domestic violence or abuse cases between non-related intimates that are black/ African-American.

**EXTRACTION FORM # \_\_\_\_\_**

**Abuser/Perpetrator \_\_\_\_\_**

**Abused/Victim \_\_\_\_\_**

**Both \_\_\_\_\_**

**Age: \_\_\_\_\_**

(form # + age will serve as personal codes)

**Gender:**

Male

Female

**Event responsible for reporting of abuse (explain):**

\_\_\_\_\_

(This abuse is in reference to the current/ past intimate relationship only; use chart below as needed.)

**Relationship:**

☐ married

☐ divorced

☐ separated

☐ living together/ roommates

☐ boyfriend/ girlfriend

☐ ex-boyfriend/ ex-girlfriend

☐ child(ren) together

☐ other relations (non-kinship)

**Income Level:**

☐ under \$5,000

☐ \$5,000-\$9,999

☐ \$10,000-\$19,999

☐ \$20,000-\$34,999

☐ \$35,000-\$49,999

☐ over \$50,000

**Exposure to Violence:** Indicate any and all occurrences of violent exposure listed in the assessment portion of the form by using the checklist below.

(Any specific examples that may identify the clients must be checked "other", but **not** explained.)

C= childhood abuse

R= abuse in most current relationship

P= abuse in past relationship

☐ violent threats

☐ use of weapon(s)/ objects

☐ harm to others

☐ use of profanity

☐ sexual abuse

☐ controlling

☐ stalking

☐ physical harm ♦

☐ substance abuse

☐ stress/ depression

☐ force/ pushing

☐ property damage

☐ yelling/ arguing

☐ restraining

☐ family involved

☐ other emotional

☐ other physical

☐ other mental

♦ includes all not listed—hitting, slapping, punching, breaking bones, etc.

\*Form reconstructed from the intake/ assessment application form of the Victim/ Witness Assistance Program, Fulton County Solicitor General's Office. Revised version of original form.



**APPENDIX 2**  
**CODE SHEET FOR THESIS DATA EXTRACTION FORMS**  
**(for the purpose of the thesis, “Abusive Relationships Among Black Heterosexual**  
**Couples as Effected by Income and Exposure to Violence”)**

♦ All files viewed must be distinguished as domestic violence or abuse cases between non-related intimates that are both black / African-American.

**1. PERSONAL CODE: Extraction Form # and Age** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Abuser(P) = 01          Abused(V) = 02          Both = 03**

**3. Gender:**          Male = 01          Female = 02

**4. Event responsible for reporting of abuse: (as many as necessary)**

Emotional Abuse = 01

Physical Abuse = 02

Mental Abuse = 03

**5. Relationship:**  
(up to 4 selections)

married = 01

divorced = 02

separated = 03

living together/ roommates = 04

boyfriend/ girlfriend = 05

ex-boyfriend/ ex-girlfriend = 06

child(ren) together = 07

other relations (non-kinship) = 08

**6. Income Level:**

under \$5,000 = 01

\$5,000-\$9,999 = 02

\$10,000-\$19,999 = 03

\$20,000-\$34,999 = 04

\$35,000-\$49,999 = 05

over \$50,000 = 06

**7. Exposure to Violence:** Indicate any and all occurrences of violent exposure listed in the assessment portion of the form by using the checklist below.

(Any specific examples that may identify the clients must be checked “other”, but not explained.)

(Up to 5 selections)

C= childhood abuse

R= abuse in most current relationship

P= abuse in past relationship

no exposure to violence reported = 00

all emotional = 01, C

all physical = 04, C

all mental = 07, C

all emotional = 02, R

all physical = 05, R

all mental = 08, R

all emotional = 03, P

all physical = 06, P

all mental = 09, P

**CONVERSION TO CATEGORICAL MEASURE OF THREE VARIABLES**

**Partner Abuse:**

1 = emotional abuse, 2 = physical abuse, 3 = mental abuse

**Income:**

1 = lower class, 2 = middle class, 3 = upper class

**Exposure to Violence:**

0 = none, 1 = emotional, 2 = physical, 3 = mental, 4 = emotional and physical,  
 5 = physical and mental, 6 = emotional and mental, 7 = all three forms of abuse

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